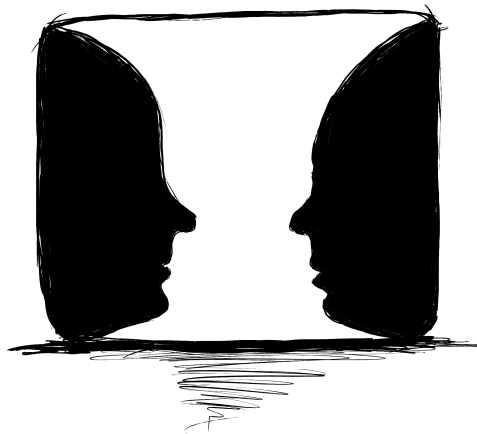


Workbook on Unconscious bias and observation distortions

Practical Benefits:

I have basic knowledge of observation and perception distortions



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Shortcut



In the field of personnel diagnostics, people are evaluated on the basis of observations with regards to their behavior and their words. Even if there are already some measurements that are carried out under computer control, the majority are still based on human observations. Since we **humans are not machines**, our observation and the resulting assessment can be subject to distortions. Our **information intake and processing takes place through**

categories and schemes that have proven to be essential for survival. However, this leads to distortions in the suitability assessment and can be understood as a source of error. In some literature and practice, it's called "**observation and assessment errors**". However, this wording is misleading. It makes it difficult to understand that we humans are fundamentally shaped and dependent on this type of information processing and that it makes it **easier for us to cope with complexity**. However, in the assessment of participants in a personnel diagnostic process, this **simplification of our brain** can be **unfair and stigmatizing** and often does not do justice to the truth. Therefore, in the following, we prefer to speak of a *distortion* rather than an *error*.

- Our information processing runs in **patterns and categories**.
- We reduce **complexity in order to be able to** cope more easily in everyday life.
- **These perceptual shortcuts** are also called **effects**. In this workbook you will get to know some of them better.



In the personal diagnostic setting there are many different errors that can occur at different stages of the process - the monitoring system can be faulty, the environment can not be properly prepared, the situation can be initiated incorrectly... However, in this workbook the focus is on the distortions, that happen through human observation and judgment.

Have you ever caught yourself categorising people and later found out you were wrong? What deceived you and how did you deal with it afterwards?



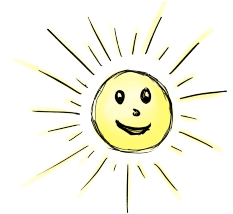


Perception

Welcome to the world of "**more appearance than reality**"- of perception's distortion. How easily our perception can outwit us is known, for example, from **optical illusions**. However, there are **more perceptual** effects apart from these common variants.

Halo effect

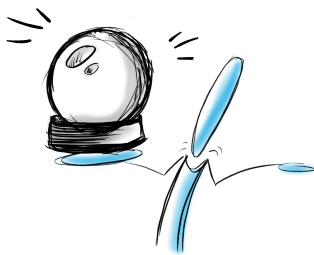
The halo effect - also known as **overexposure effect** means that individual features perceived as positive or negative **outshine the rest of the person** making the other features appear smaller and less important. For example, a person's facial expression, their external appearance or reports about other people can lead to this.



Another effect that can be included in the halo effect is the so-called **nimbus effect**. "Beautiful people" are **classified as smarter and more competent**.

Primacy Recency Effect

This effect is about **memory**. Information and impressions received first are remembered better and are therefore **unconsciously weighted more heavily in the evaluation**. But even things that were recent are remembered better and carry more weight.



Andorra Effect

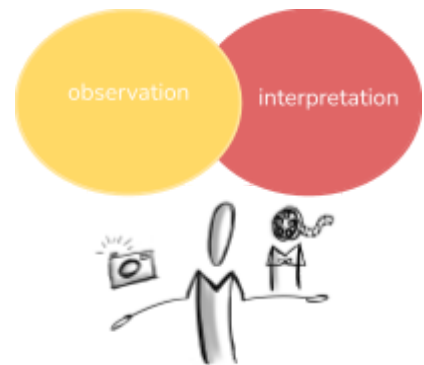
The Andorra Effect describes a **self-fulfilling prophecy** of the evaluator. If, for example, the applicant was recommended by a colleague, the evaluator expects more from him or her and this in turn encourages the applicant and the prognosis comes true. This applies to both **positive and negative prophecies**.

Contrast Effect

This is a very common perceptual effect. The participating person **is compared with the previous or following person**. The participants tend to receive a poorer rating for average performance if the predecessor made a particularly positive impression or, conversely, a better rating if the predecessor made a particularly negative impression. What seems harmless at first is fatal. Because **comparisons should always only be made with the requirement characteristics** and not with the people themselves!

Perception and interpretation

A very important step in observation is the **separation of perception and interpretation**. This requires a lot of practice, because we are used to immediately attaching an interpretation to perception in everyday life. Depending on **our experience and personal self-concept, we filter our perception** and interpret it in order to find our way in the world.



For example, if the other person yawns while we're talking, **different interpretations** go through our heads:

- a) He*She is **bored by what I'm saying**.
- b) The poor! Apparently their kid **didn't let them sleep through ...**
- c) What **rude behavior**. With our boss they would pull themselves together more!

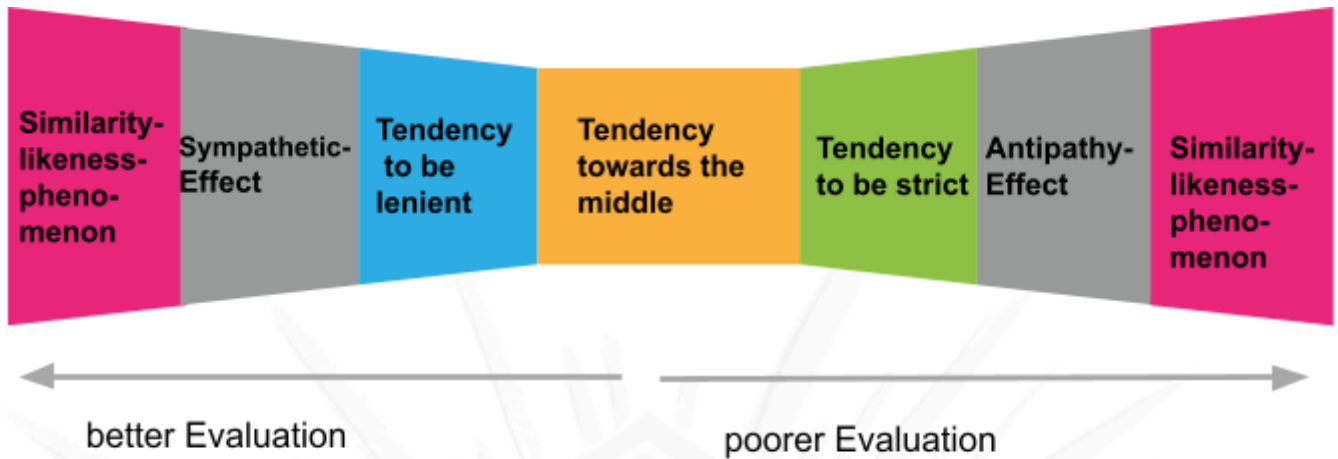
All of these interpretations **are based on the same perception**. Therefore, make sure you try to decouple them from your interpretation in order to create as undistorted picture of reality as possible. Write down several **behavioral** anchors that you base your observation on.

Cognitive problems

In addition to the distortions listed, cognitive problems can also occur. These include **perceptual problems, processing problems, memory problems, storage problems, and observatioblems**.

Scale distortions

In addition to distortions of perception, there are also distortions of scale that play a role in the assessment:



Similarity-likeness phenomenon	Whoever assesses needs standards. The problem, intuitively, is that we fall back on ourselves. If the participating person is similar to us, we automatically rate it better. If it is foreign to us (through behavior, culture, appearance) we rate it worse.
Sympathetic Effect	The same applies to the sympathetic effect - "sympathetic" = good rating, "unsympathetic" = poorer rating.
Tendency to be lenient	This means that the assessor is less demanding than the other assessors. This often occurs when the assessor is not well prepared for the observation, is new to the team, or is uncertain for other reasons.
Tendency towards the middle	Meanvalues on the scale disproportionately often → scaling with an even number of values. The reasons for this can also be uncertainty on the part of the assessor, but also laziness.
Tendency to be strict	Aspiration level higher than the other assessors distorts the assessment in the direction of a poorer rating.

(Un)conscious falsification

This category is about the joint decision **at the end of an assessment**. The assessors can feel influenced by each other or by the organization.

Decision conformity

With decision conformity, **one's own results adjusted to those of others**. This happens when there is pressure to behave as the group expects them to. This problem can be **avoided by avoiding so-called harmonization**. This means that there is no coordination with the other observers after the individual evaluation.

Assessment as a means to an end

This should not happen in an assessment that is to be taken seriously, in order to sharpen one's perspective nonetheless: It happens that **company goals or the assessor's own goals guide the result in assessment processes**! For example, the performance of an employee is undervalued so that he*she stays with the department or so as not to jeopardize his*her own position.



Tips for Being Sensitive to Perceptual Bias

It is a fallacy for experienced observers to believe that they are completely immune to perceptual bias. The difference to an inexperienced person is that he*she **notices it, reflects instantly** and tries **not to include this in the evaluation**.

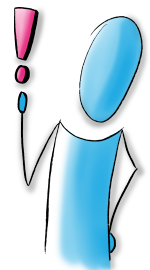
Here are a few tips on how you can be careful when observing and evaluate more fairly and objectively:

1. **Be aware of the different effects and reflect on them regularly.**
2. **Record observations in writing. Take as many notes as you can with behavioral anchors - what do you base your observation on? Describe as much and as accurately as possible.**
3. **Use standardized observation sheets whenever possible. This way you and your team can easily compare your observations and it is easier for you to concentrate on the observation.**
4. **You are not a machine! If a distortion of perception has slipped through your mind without reflection - address this in the team and correct your mistake if possible. If this doesn't work: You and your team can now learn from it so that you can do better next time.**
5. **Question your thought patterns!**

What kind of people do you often perceive as **particularly competent or likeable**?

What behaviors make you unsympathetic or incompetent?

Would you **describe yourself as strict or mild**? How do you determine that?



Links & Notes

#	Links - In-depth
1	Test Kuratorium, DU (2017a, August 7). Designing personnel selection competently: Basics and practice of suitability diagnostics according to DIN 33430 (German Edition) (1st ed. 2018). Springer.